Migrant networks and gender in Congolese and Senegalese international migration

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Short Abtract

The influence of social networks on international migration has been shown in a variety of settings. But research integrating both social networks and gender issues in the analyses of migration processes has remained rare. In this paper, we use recent and original longitudinal data collected to assess the impact of social networks on African international migration and to evaluate gender differences in the role of social networks. We further investigate differences between two sub-Saharan African countries with different migration histories and cultural backgrounds. The quantitative data for this study comes from the international MAFE-Project (Migration between AFrica and Europe). It mainly consists in life histories collected both in origin (Senegal DR Congo) and European destination countries (France, Spain, Italy and Belgium).

Background and objectives

The influence of social networks on international migration has been shown in a variety of settings (Massey & Garcia España, 1987; Curran and Saguy, 1991). Migrant networks – defined as the links between migrants or return migrants and persons living in the country of origin – influence migration at different stages of the migration process. By providing information, they may contribute to the decision of migration, the choice of destination and the route of migration. They also facilitate the integration of migrants upon arrival, and may shape migrants remitting behaviour. In the last two decades, research has also shown important gender differences in international migration. Differences refer among others to the motivations for moving to another country, social norms regarding migration, and risks associated with migrations.

As noted by Curran and Saguy (2001), research integrating both social networks and gender issues in the analyses of migration processes has remained rare. However, several hypotheses have been suggested as to why the role of social networks may influence males and females in a different way, and a few studies have provided empirical evidence for the differential effects of networks on male and female migrations (Curran & Rivero Fuentes, 2003; Davis & Winter, 2001; Stecklov et al., 2008).

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In this paper, we use recent and original longitudinal data collected in Senegal and DR Congo to assess the impact of social networks on international migration and to evaluate gender differences in the role of social networks. We further investigate differences between two sub-Saharan African countries with different migration histories and cultural backgrounds.

Our research complements existing research in several respects. First, very little research exist on this topic apart from research on migration between Mexico and the US, and to our knowledge, no quantitative research exists in Africa. Secondly, comparative research between two countries, using strictly comparable data and methods, provides an opportunity to test the role of context-specific factors on this topic, e.g. difference in female autonomy. Finally, this study relies on the use of longitudinal data on social networks collected at the individual level, allowing for a fine-grained approach to the measurement of migrant networks.

The first objective of this paper will be to measure the influence of social networks on the probability of moving abroad, among both males and females. As shown in previous research, we expect that social networks have a stronger effect on female migration than on male migrations, and that the gender composition of networks also influences migration. We also posit that the role of social networks will be higher where female autonomy is lower and social control higher, as it is the case in Senegal compared to DR Congo.

Next, we will address the question of the influence of social networks on the choice of destination. We expect females' choices to be more restricted than are males' for two reasons. The first hypothesis is that the size and the diversity of social networks are smaller among females than among males, and are essentially kin-based networks. The second is that the destinations of female migrants are more likely to be influenced by the presence of close relatives in destination areas than they are for males. We also expect that destination choices will be more limited among Senegalese women than among Congolese women.

Finally, we investigate the role of migrant networks in the development of autonomous female migrations in both countries. Qualitative research suggests that autonomous female migration has gained momentum in several African countries. We will first measure changes in female migrations over time in both countries, and then evaluate the role of networks for understanding these changes. We expect that the size of migrant networks has grown among females over time and that the part of female migrants in these networks has become larger. This change in the size and composition of networks may help explain the increase in autonomous female migration, through a phenomenon of cumulative causation (Massey, 1990; Curran, Garip and Chung, 2005)

Data

The quantitative data for this study comes from longitudinal surveys conducted as part of the international MAFE-Project (**M**igration between **AF**rica and **E**urope). Household data and individual life histories have been collected in two capital-cities of African countries: Dakar (Senegal) and Kinshasa (DR Congo), and in some destination countries of migrants (France, Spain, Italy). The surveys were organized by the INED and the IPDSR for the Senegalese part of the project (in early 2008), and by the University of Kinshasa and the Catholic University of Louvain for the Congolese part of the project (in late 2007). The surveys are to a large extent comparable across countries.

Household surveys were conducted in departure countries, and mainly allow measuring household characteristics, migration from the household, and remittances to the household. Life history surveys were collected in both departure countries and in some destination countries[1]. They include detailed retrospective information on international and internal migrations, employment, marriages, births and remittances. International migration histories of relatives and friends were also collected from each participant in the life history survey. As a result, the survey allows reconstructing the migrant networks history of each individual (non-migrants, return migrants and migrants living in the destination countries). The data set indicates, at every point in time, the size of the migrant network of each individual (number of relatives or friends living abroad) and the characteristics of its members (gender, place of residence…). In addition, the questionnaire includes links between the network module and questions in the migration histories. This allows identifying the role of the members of the network at several stages of the migration process (choice of destination, funding, housing…). In this paper, we use the information from the life histories collected in departure and destination countries.

Method

Both descriptive and multivariate methods will be used. First, characteristics of migrant networks (size, gender composition, location of its members…) will be described and compared by gender in each origin country, and for different migration status (migrant, non

[1] In DR Congo, 992 individual life histories were collected between August and September 2007 from a sample of return migrants and non migrants aged 20-60. In Senegal, 1,400 life histories were collected among return migrants and non migrants aged 25 to 75. 600 life histories were collected from Senegalese migrants in France, Spain and Italy (200 per country). A comparable survey among Congolese migrants in Belgium will be conducted in March 2009.

migrant, return migrant). The specific roles of the members of the networks in helping people migrating will also be analyzed by linking the network module and the migration module.

Next, discrete-time event history models will be used to test the influence of the migrant networks on the risk of international migration[2]. These methods are particularly well suited to modelling the occurrence of events and to estimate the effects of time-varying covariates. Competing risks models, estimated using multinomial logistic regression, will be used to analyze the choice of destination. In both countries, separate models will be estimated for males and females.

Control variables will include age and time period, as well as time-varying individual socio-economic characteristics (level of education, type of employment, marital status and number of children). The size, composition, and characteristics (place of residence, links with respondents…) of migrant networks will be included as time-varying variables.

Preliminary results

Characteristics of migrant networks

Preliminary results from the Congolese data indicate that migrant networks are widespread (Vause, 2008). In Kinshasa, seventy percent of the respondents mentioned at least one person in his/her migrant network. In other words, they know at least one person currently living abroad, or who lived abroad at some point in time. Migrant networks also vary in a significant way between males and females. 75% of males declare that at least one of their relatives or friends lives or lived abroad, compared to 65% among females.

Impact of migrant networks on migrations

Event-history analyses with time varying variables also show that the size of the migrant network has a strong influence on the probability of moving, and that the effects of migrant networks also vary across gender (Table 1)[3]. Among males, odds ratios vary from 1.8 for people who know 1-2 people abroad to 3.5 for people with a network of 5 people or more. Among females, the impact of the social networks ranges from 3.2 to more than 12 for women with a network of at least 5 people. These preliminary results confirm both that

[2] International migration is defined as a change of country of residence for at least 6 months. All migrations from age 18 will be included in the models.
[3] These results are obtained using life histories collected in DR Congo alone, and include only non-migrants and return migrants. Final analyses will include samples of migrants in destination countries as well

networks definitely matter in African international migration, and that females rely much more than males on migrant networks for engaging in migration.

Table 1: Discrete-time event history models of determinants of first international migration among Congolese males and females, period 1980-2007.

Explanatory variables	Odds ratios	
	Males	Females
Period		
1980-1990 (R)	1.00	1.00
1991-1995	1.51**	1.69 (ns)
1996-1998	0,89 (ns)	0.78 (ns)
1999-2003	1.72 **	1.67 (ns)
2004-2007	0.67 (ns)	1.02 (ns)
Age group		
15-29 ans	11.18 ***	1.39 (ns)
30-44 ans	3.92 *	1.78 (ns)
45-49 ans (R)	1.00	1.00
Residence		
Living with parents (R)	1.00	1.00
Not living with parents	1.17 (ns)	2.13 **
Children		
At least one child (R)	1.00	1.00
No children	0.62 (ns)	0.81 **
Marital Status		
Married (R)	1.00	1.00
Unmarried	1.29 (ns)	1,788 *
Activity		
Student (R)	1.00	1.00
Employed / intern	4.16 ***	2.24 (ns)
Unemployed	1.08 (ns)	2.54 *
Other	1.80 (ns)	0.00 (ns)
Education		
No education (R)	1.00	1.00
Primary education	0.89 (ns)	1.12 (ns)
Secondary education	0.65 (ns)	0.92 (ns)
Higher education	0.60 (ns)	1.05 (ns)
Migrant network size		
No network (R)	1.00	1.00
1-2 members	1.83 ***	3.24 ***
3-4 members	3.39 ***	5.08 ***
5 and over	3.47 ***	12.53 ***

Significance levels: *:p<0.1; **:p<0.05; ***:p<0.01; ns : not significant.

(R) : Reference category

Source of data : Congo MAFE-Survey, Kinshasa (2007)

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